

PROSPECT; or, *View of the Moral World.*

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Errors of date—In No.'s 31, 32, for *June* read *July*.

Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 12.

THIS chapter contains an account of a strange institution called the Passover, in the establishment of which the Jewish God appears in his usual defective character with circumscribed powers, and like finite beings standing in need of hints and tokens of recollection to enable him to perform his duty. The blood was sprinkled upon the posts of the doors to mark a distinction between the objects of his mercy and the objects of his vengeance. Does any believer in revelation imagine that such previous arrangements were necessary to guide the destroying footsteps of the most high? If so they must have as poor an opinion of the powers of their God as they have of their own, and in such case divinity dwindles into manhood, and the character of genuine Theism is lost in the imperfections of human nature. The first exceptionable particular contained in this chapter is in these words, verse 10th. "And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire." Such a foolish contradiction upon a trifling subject would not be worth notice, were it not that every absurdity proves want of divinity and shews that this book is an imposition upon the world. In the first place, of the lambs or goats which they cooked, they were to let nothing remain; in the next place what did remain they were to burn with fire. Now the great question to believers is this, how much of a thing remains where nothing remains? Solve this and ye shall be called great mathematicians and Philosophers. It is however holy writ, and as such we have no reason to expect either correctness or consistency. In the 23d verse of this chapter there is mention made of that mark of recollection of which we have already spoken, and which was to serve as

a direction to the Jewish God in his intended slaughter. "And when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side-posts the Lord will pass over the door." Fine representation this of infinite wisdom; worthy of ignorance to propagate and superstition to believe! After God had drowned the world, he set a rainbow in the cloud to remind him that he ought not do the like thing again. Here he orders blood to be sprinkled upon the doors to prevent mistakes, and guard the lives of his chosen people against the vengeance that awaited their enemies. Such ideas and descriptions of divine power must have originated in days of darkness and of superstition; they stamp with ignorance and with infamy any book in which they are found, and they will become hereafter, to the reflecting mind of man, perpetual mementoes against superstition, and religious folly of every kind whatever. It appears by the 29th verse of this chapter, that God once more stretcheth forth his all destroying hand against the Royal Tyrant of Egypt, and smiteth the first born from monarch on his throne down to the captive in the dungeon. In the 5th verse of the preceding chapter, this savage slaughter of children is predicted. "And all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill." Who this maid was behind the mill nobody knows; were it not that her first-born also was included in the bloody decree, it might be presumed that she was one of Moses's sweethearts, or that she was another female character similar to the Virgin Mary, with charms to command celestial attachment, and excite the amorous overtures of the Jewish Jupiter himself. Be this as it may, the account shows to what contemptible particulars this book descends. What has a girl sitting with her baby behind a mill to do with divine revelation? Perhaps it was a type or shadow of something to come, and if so, the wisdom of Christian commentators will be abundantly competent to a satisfactory exposition. But it is much more important for believers to explain the reasons of Jehovah's conduct,

and exculpate their God from the just charge of cruelty, injustice and murder. Lice, frogs, flies, blood, fury and vengeance, were sent forth upon the Egyptian king, to induce him to let the chosen people of God depart; divine efforts were repeated over and over again to produce an effect which God by a single command, by one solitary act of power could have accomplished in a moment. Believers in revelation will ye pass once more in review these miraculous tales of antiquity and then ask the question whether you see in them ought but ignorance and superstition on the one hand; and on the other incompetence of divine power united with folly, cruelty and murder. A single sentiment of moral truth which teaches man sympathy benevolence and justice is worth a thousand pages of such miserable and contemptible stuff.

TO THE EDITOR.

More of Human Reason.

“Reason,” says a believer to an infidel, “is a deceitful and blind guide, and in spiritual concerns will infallibly lead to destruction.” “How are you assured of it?” says the other—“to which of my faculties is this addressed? Does reason by exercising its own powers discover its own treachery? If so, does, it not in the act of communicating give the lie direct to the sentiment? If your reason can so clearly discern that it is obscured, it cannot surely be that very blind guide you would represent it.—If it cannot so discern, the assertion is evidently made at random, and requires examination.”—“I am enabled, (replies the believer,) to see spiritually, and you only carnally—your mind is not yet endued with divine grace, and until an inward change is effected, which cannot be wrought but by God himself, you cannot perceive the force of what is addressed to you.—Be not however led astray by the subtle and specious arts of sophistry; but

believe, and trust in God to work the change in your heart at his own good pleasure."

Now one of these beings makes a serious and solemn assertion which the other verily disbelieves and denies.—Supposing them both equally honest and sincere (for the unbeliever cannot surely be censurable for not using that which the believer tells him he has not and cannot have till God sends it) how is their difference of opinion to be canvassed, and the error corrected? With what mental powers are they respectively to set about the enquiry? Is the truth of the question to be on both sides—examined by the help of reason or without it, or with some other and what faculty? Or is one party (who has nothing better) to exercise his single talent on the occasion, while the other opposes to it a power which to reason is declared incomprehensible. If the carnal man and the spiritual are conveying their thoughts through a different medium, how can they ever come to a point? and where is the utility of the latter's sowing where nothing can be reaped, or in other words, of calling pearls before swine? For the spiritual man says, the carnal one, cannot understand him when he speaks the truth spiritually, though according to his own account, he is at the same moment opposing to a mere human faculty, one that partakes of the divine.

If a book called profane be put into the hands of a stranger, it will be admitted that he is to examine it with his natural understanding; but how is he to act when the bible is produced to him, particularly when informed by the human producer, that it is a divine communication and not to be examined like productions merely human? How is he to set about considering that to the proper examination whereof his reason is declared incompetent? Is he with his unassisted faculties to examine and judge of it as well as he can until he hears express from Heaven with better, or is he to rely implicitly on human intelligence which accompanies it, and lay down or lock up the book till celestial optics are given for the purpose? The contents of the bible being first received through the

same channels as those of any other work, can the reason of a believer, like the stops of an organ, be shoved aside and the faculty fitted for this occult study introduced at pleasure into its room?—The cononical books of the Old and New Testament must no doubt be read with the spiritual faculty and the uncanonical apocrypha with the natural, but how suddenly to convey the matter of these respective works through the eyes and ears of their readers to the appropriated powers of the mind is the difficulty.—Is there in the bible (dictated as is said by God) any passage signifying that the understanding of its readers shall not take cognizance of its sentiments, and if such should (upon spiritualizing something for the purpose) be found in it how can reason, while it reads, avoid controverting the position and refusing to knuckle to a usurper?—To what faculty of the human mind is the bible supposed originally to have been addressed? How can it be a revelation to man, if it must steer clear of his reason as a ship avoids a shoal? If it be not intended to be examined by the faculty which distinguishes man from brute, why is it not as fit to be addressed to brutes as to men? If the prime and essential quality of man is not to meddle with it, why is it addressed to man in particular?—We are not it is said, to examine a divine communication with a human and imperfect understanding. How then must it be examined? We cannot do it with any thing divine, and if not cognizable by human reason, why must it be examined with something inferior to reason which is still human?—If there be any fault in examining a divine present with human powers; with whom do believers contend that such fault originates? It is said to have been revealed for the benefit of human sinners, who nevertheless are declared incapable of reading it to any purpose until they can send to Heaven for spectacles.—If the book is not to be examined by unassisted human faculties, why has the supposed revelation been made to human beings, or why did not a divine key or glossary accompany it?

The truth is, that this same thing called a revelation

is, according to the believer's own account of it, not a thing revealed or made plain; but something placed by God in the sight of man requiring abundance of explanation, which nevertheless cannot be had—without further supernatural assistance. This same supernatural assistance too, of which (though said to be given for the important purpose of expounding God's word to his creatures) no proof has ever been exhibited, causes its pretended possessors to put different and contradictory constructions upon the same divine passages (thereby increasing the difficulty) and in effect to charge each other as madmen or impostors.—They are unanimous only (where they cannot help it) in failing to produce evidence of their authority, and yet arrogantly claim from their fellow mortals a blind and passive assent to all their jarring and inconsistent assertions, taking fire even at the expression of a doubt. A system of religion thus aiming to subvert Heaven's best gift to man, and involved in such a budget of absurdity, is at war with every attribute of divinity and deserves the solemn reprobation of every upright mind.

Extracts from the Ancient Records of Massachusetts.

Josiah Plaistowe, for stealing four baskets of corn from the Indians, is ordered to return them eight baskets, to be fined five pounds, and hereafter to be called by the name of Josias, and not Mr. as formerly he used to be.

Serjeant Perkins, ordered to carry forty tufts to the fort, for being drunk.

Edward Palmer, for his extortion in taking two pounds thirteen shillings and four pence, for the wood work of Boston stocks, is fined four pounds, and ordered to be set one hour in the stocks.

Captain Lovel, admonished to take heed of light carriage.

Thomas Petit, for suspicion of slander, idleness, and stubbornness, is sentenced to be severely whipped, and to be kept in hold.

Catherine the wife of Richard Cornish, was found suspicious of incontinency, and seriously admonished to take heed.

Daniel Clarke, found to be an immoderate drinker, was fined forty shillings.

John Wedgewood, for being in the company of drunkards, to be set in the stocks.

John Kitchen, for shewing books which he was commanded to bring to the governor, and forbid to shew them to any other, and yet shewed them, was fined ten shillings.

Robert Shorthose, for swearing by the blood of God, was sentenced to have his tongue put into a cleft stick, and to stand so for the space of half an hour.

Profession of Faith from Rousseau, continued.

On the contrary, the serenity of the just is internal, his smiles are not those of malignity but of joy : The source of them is found in himself, and he is as chearful when alone, as in the midst of an assembly : he derives not contentment from those who approach him, but communicates it to them.

Cast your eye over the several nations of the world, take a retrospective view of their histories. Amidst all the many inhuman and absurd forms of worship, amidst all the prodigious diversity of manners and characters, you will every where find the same ideas of justice and honesty, the same notions of good and evil. Ancient paganism adopted the most abominable deities, which it would have punished on earth as infamous criminals ; deities that presented no other picture of supreme happiness, than the commissions of crimes and the gratification of their passions. But vice, armed even with sacred authority, descended in vain, on earth ; moral instinct influenced the human heart to revolt against it. Even in celebrating the debaucheries of Jupiter, the world admired and respected the continence of Zenocrates ; the

chaste Lucretia adored the impudent Venus ; the intrepid Roman sacrificed to Fear ; they invoked the God who disabled his father, and yet died without murmuring by the hand of theirs ; the most contemptible divinities were adored by the noblest of men. The voice of nature more powerful than that of the Gods, made itself respected on earth, and seemed to have banished vice to Heaven.

There evidently exists, therefore, in the soul of man, an innate principle of justice and goodness ; by which, in spite of our own maxims, we approve or condemn the actions of ourselves, and others : to this principle it is that I give the appellation of conscience.

At this word, however, I hear the clamour of our metaphysicians ; who all exclaim about the mistakes of infancy, and the prejudices of education. There is nothing, they say, in the human mind but what is instilled by experience ; nor can we judge of any thing but from the ideas we have acquired. Nay, they go farther, and venture to reject the universal sense of all nations ; seeking some obscure example known only to themselves, to controvert this striking uniformity in the judgment of mankind :

To be continued.

* * Discourses concerning the principles and effects of the Christian Religion, will be delivered every Sunday evening at the Assembly-Room, No. 68, William-street.

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